

WILLS STREET, 'WILLSMERE'

Original Use: Kew Asylum
Date of Construction: 1864-1880s²⁶
Architect: A.E. Johnson, J.J. Clark, S. Merrett, William Wardell,
Peter Kerr, A.T. Snow and G.W. Watson²⁷

DESIGNATION A
CITATION NO.71



HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

In the north-west corner of Kew, and bounded by the Yarra, land was initially set aside for a village reserve but the site subsequently was occupied by the Kew Asylum²⁸. Commenced as a replacement for the overcrowded lunatic asylum at Yarra Bend²⁹, the earliest buildings on this site are the two lodges and the entrance gateways designed by architects in the Public Works Department³⁰. The first section of the main building was begun in 1864 and completed in December 1871 at a cost of £155,958³¹, while throughout 1870s and 1880s the Department continued the construction, additions and repair of Asylum buildings³². The Asylum is massive in extent and forms an 'E' shape in plan: the same form as those at Ararat and Beechworth, but far larger. The overall style of the building is the Italianate, with a pavilioned form, squat tower flanking the entrance, and a slate mansard roof. The building itself is tall, and it is set on a very high point of land above the Yarra River. As a result is clearly visible for a great distance around Melbourne.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Statement of Significance given here is that adopted by the Australian Heritage Commission: 'Kew Mental Hospital, Princess Street Kew, is one of the few landmarks prominent throughout Melbourne. The complex is probably the largest erected in the nineteenth century in Victoria and is architecturally a most notable example of such an institution erected by the Public Works Department of Victoria in the Italianate style. The complex is distinctive for its design, the central block being the most important part, but is of greater significance for its overall planning complete with surrounding dwarf walls.

HERITAGE LISTINGS

HBR: N/A

GBR: Registered.

RNE: Registered.

National Trust: Classified No.1278

¹ HBC, 'Willsmere Hospital, Princess Street, Kew: Background', held in file No.83/3780

² Contributing architects were also members of the Public Works Department. HBC, loc.cit..

³ 'Kew Urban Conservation Study: History - Final Draft'

⁴ .Trethowan, loc.cit

⁵ Architects' Index, University of Melbourne

⁶ National Trust of Aust.(Vic), 'Research into Former Male Attendants' Mess Room...', 29 May 1979

⁷ The Architects' Index and Trethowan's report give a comprehensive listing of works undertaken.